

(Washington, D.C.) -- In a huge victory for western Pennsylvania's small businesses and seniors, U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-04) today helped pass legislation that will delay implementation of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Service's (CMS) competitive bidding program for durable medical equipment for 18 months. If this bill does not become law, hundreds of small medical equipment suppliers in western Pennsylvania will lose their ability to sell equipment to Medicare beneficiaries starting July 1. The Senate is expected to vote on the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008, which passed the House by a vote of 355-59, later this week.

“This vote is a significant victory for small medical equipment suppliers in western Pennsylvania and the seniors they serve,” Altmire said. **“CMS’s competitive bidding program was poorly implemented from the beginning because it ignored the personal role small businesses play in meeting patients’ needs. I hope that the Senate will follow the House’s lead and pass this bill as soon as possible so we can improve the competitive bidding program to ensure it both saves seniors’ money and preserves their access to quality care.”**

Congressman Altmire has led the way in reviewing CMS's implementation of DME competitive bidding and was one of the first members of Congress to call for a delay in the program in order to protect small businesses and ensure Medicare recipients did not lose access to suppliers that they have gone to for years. Last October, Congressman Altmire, as Chair of the Small Business Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, called a hearing on the program. He followed this hearing with letters to the Small Business Administration, CMS, and the House Ways and Means Committee pushing them to protect seniors and ensure competitive bidding does not hurt small businesses.

The Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008 that passed today also includes two other Altmire initiatives. The bill includes a provision of the Relief and Elimination of the Medicare Enrollment Deadline Penalty (REMEDY) Act (H.R. 1310), legislation Congressman Altmire introduced last year to provide relief to over 4 million Medicare beneficiaries who could be penalized for not signing up for prescription drug coverage during the Medicare Part D program's enrollment period.

It also increases financial incentives to encourage doctors to use e-prescribing technology that can reduce costly medical errors and save lives. As a co-chair of the New Democrats Health Care Task Force, Congressman Altmire is working to improve the quality and affordability of health care by investing in health IT initiatives like e-prescribing and by paying doctors based on the quality of care provided.